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AUTHOR Clasby, Miriam; And Others
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ABSTRACT

This chapter evaluates Florida legislation establishing school advisory committees and is intended to improve understanding of both the potential and the problems of school advisory committees. It begins by examining advisory committees across the nation. It then turns to an analysis of school advisory committees in Florida. The report on local-level implementation of legislation for school advisory committees and annual reports of school progress draws on several different data sources: (1) a brief survey of each of the 67 districts; (2) an indepth survey of 287 local committee chairpersons and principals; (3) field interviews with 88 local participants; (4) content analyses of annual reports of school progress and policy statements and guidelines for school advisory committees from 36 districts. Field data are organized according to types and composition of school advisory committees, their functions, and annual reports of school progress and public communication. Findings and recommendations are summarized at the conclusion of the report. (Author/MLF)

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IMPROVING EDUCATION IN FLORIDA:

A REASSESSMENT

Prepared for the

Select Joint Committee on Public Schools

of the Florida Legislature

and supported through grants from

the Florida Legislature, Ford Foundation and

The National Conference of State Legislatures

This public document was promulgated at the base cost of $2,645.78 for 1,000 copies or $3.15 per copy to inform the members of the Legislature and the public regarding the changes that have occurred in public schools since 1973 with additional recommendations for continued improvement.

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February 1978

This report was commissioned

by the

Select Joint Committee on Public Schools
of the Florida Legislature

Senator Curtis Peterson, Chairman
Representative James L. Redman, Vice Chairman
Representative William C. Andrews
Representative Clark Maxwell, Jr.
Senator Kenneth H. MacKay, Jr.
Senator John T. Ware

Staff Director: Mr. Herman Myers
Select Joint Committee on Public Schools

and prepared by a

Consultant Team

Luvern L. Cunningham, Coordinator of the Consultant Team, Ohio State University, Columbus
Miriam Clasby, Institute for Responsive Education, Boston
Don Davies, Institute for Responsive Education
Robert J. Goettel, State University of New York, Albany
Dale Lake, Management Consultant, Severne Park, Maryland
Raphael O. Nystrand, Ohio State University
Lawrence C. Pierce, University of Oregon, Eugene
Richard C. Snyder, Ohio State University
Oron South, Florida State University, Tallahassee
Diana Thomason, University of California, Berkeley
Lonnie Wagstaff, Ohio State University

with the assistance of

Linda Lobello, Florida State University, Tallahassee
James F. Stanton, Institute for Responsive Education
Sarah Newcomb, State University of New York, Albany
John Willard, State University of New York, Albany

FOREWORD

Florida's system of public schools has undergone more major changes in policy and operations since 1973 than at any other time since the enactment of the Minimum Foundation Program in 1947. A new era of changes was introduced when the findings and recommendations of the Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education were presented in March 1973.

The Florida Legislature has considered all of the recommendations. Some were adopted exactly as proposed. Others were adopted in modified versions. Others were capable of implementation by the Executive Branch or local school districts without further legislative action. And, finally, a small number of the Committee's proposals were specifically rejected.

The Governor's Citizens' Committee report and the legislative actions that followed have been watched with interest by legislative and education leaders from throughout the nation. Indeed, Florida has become a "model" for many other states.

Several members of the Florida Senate and the House of Representatives who were instrumental in bringing about these changes during 1973-1977 felt a pressing need to have an objective and in-depth evaluation of the results of these changes. Implementation of the reforms had not been uniform among the 67 school districts of Florida. Reports on the success or failure of various aspects of the program varied depending on who was asked, not only from district to district, but even

among the personnel within a single district. At the urging of those members who had been involved through the years, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives appointed three members each to form a Select Joint Committee on Public Schools for the purpose of conducting this needed evaluation.

Because of national interest in the Florida program, the Select Committee obtained financial assistance from three sources: The National Conference of State Legislatures, the Ford Foundation, and the Florida Legislature. Grateful acknowledgement is made to all of the sponsors of this study, as well as to the personnel of the Florida Department of Education for their cooperation and assistance.

Being aware of the magnitude of the study, the limited time available, and the need to maintain maximum objectivity, the Select Joint Committee decided to engage well-known experts in their respective fields of speciality. Consultants were employed from across the United States, most of whom had few, if any, ties to Florida. Their names and positions are contained elsewhere in this report.

The report contained herein is the independent work product of the consultant team. The Select Committee will carefully consider these findings and recommendations, solicit the views of all interested parties, and ultimately offer its own recommendations to the 1978 Session of the Florida Legislature.

The Select Joint Committee on Public Schools expresses

sincere appreciation for the services of the consultants, the many school board members, school administrators, teachers, members of the school advisory councils, and all other persons who contributed so freely of their time and energy in making possible this study and evaluation of Florida's public school system.

Senator Curtis Peterson
Chairman

PREFACE

Members of the consultant team wish to express their gratitude to the hundreds of persons in Florida who contributed time and thought to this study. The cooperation and support which the team received throughout the state were unprecedented. We wish to express our gratitude, too, to the members of the Select Joint Committee on Public Schools of the Florida Legislature for their special contribution to the planning and direction of the entire effort. Senator Curtis Peterson, Chairman, Representative James Redman, Vice Chairman, Mr. Herman Myers of the Senate Education Committee and his staff, and Mr. Frank Caldwell of the House of Representatives Education Committee and his staff were available on call to assist us. So were staff persons from the Department of Education, the Governor's office, and professional and citizens' organizations in Florida.

The consultant team wishes to note the excellent work of Mr. Henry Cothran, then a member of the Senate Education Committee staff, who assisted in the early weeks of the study's development. Mr. Herman Myers served as project manager from August 1977 through completion of the study. His effective leadership and management contributed substantially to the work of the team. Mr. Myers was assisted ably by Mrs. Joan Harrell.

We believe that the Select Joint Committee's recognition of the need for the consultant team "to cast a wide net" was

of exceptional importance. That advice was respected and pursued. Thus, the recommendations are based upon comprehensive data, gathered through several approaches, and cross validated as a consequence of three sub-groups of consultants working simultaneously on parts of the total responsibility.

The prospects are excellent for further effective implementation of the 1973 legislation, strengthening the technical assistance service of the Department of Education, perfecting a system of legislative oversight, and involving citizens fundamentally in educational improvements at the state and local levels.

The Consultant Team

Luvern L. Cunningham
Coordinator

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PROLOGUE

This document is unique in both its subject matter and its origins. Few studies have been made of the effectiveness of citizens groups or of the legislation their reports initiate. Similarly, little has been written about technical assistance delivery systems of departments of education or legislative oversight for education. And seldom do legislative leaders initiate assessments that include the examination of their handiwork such as this assessment sponsored by the Select Joint Committee on Public Schools of the Florida Legislature.

The recommendations that follow are the result of several months of study and analysis. The consultant team began its work in the summer of 1977. Nearly six months were used in data collection, analysis, and report preparation. Throughout this period, members of the consultant team stayed in close communication with the Select Joint Committee on Public Schools. The Committee gave general direction and supervision to the work. But at the same time, the Committee permitted the consultants remarkable freedom and latitude, not only to determine the form and processes of inquiry but to allow for the incorporation of a broad set of participants, repondents, and data. Similarly, the Committee assisted in focusing the research questions but did not mandate them. The consultant panel worked within the general boundaries established by members of the Select Committee.

Educational leaders, both lay and professional in Florida, were exceptionally cooperative and helpful. Requests for data were

fulfilled immediately. When leaders were asked to react to tentative conclusions, they did so without hesitation. The hospitality at all levels was remarkable. Each member of the consultant team has commented upon the warmth and genuineness of their welcome at the classroom, local building, school district, and state levels. No one refused to meet with a representative of the study team. People always gave generously of their time and, on occasion, did so at some personal and/or professional inconvenience.

More is said about the study method later on in this report. It should be noted in the introduction, however, that a combination of study approaches was utilized. Some were conventional--others less so. For example, traditional survey research approaches were employed. Questionnaires were sent to several samples of leaders in Florida, and structured interviews were conducted. Those data were aggregated and appear in several places in this document.

The non-traditional aspects of the work are related to less formal data-collection procedures. Members of the study team met with several groups and reviewed the purposes and objectives of the study, provided progress reports, and solicited reactions to specific questions posed by members of the consultant panel. On occasion, meetings were tape recorded, transcribed later, and those transcriptions were used as data out of which conclusions and recommendations emerged. The team found meetings with groups especially helpful. Such sessions often produced new insights and, on other occasions, served to confirm observations made earlier

by others. They were able to some extent to achieve successive reviews of their thinking and consequent verifications of some of their observations as a result of using this method. The same theory was applied to interview processes. Data collected from early interviews were often fed back to later respondents for reaction.

In the early stages of their planning, the consultants were aware of the interrelatedness of their three study foci. The evaluation of recent legislation and their method and approach to achieve that appraisal were to be closely related to the review of provisions of the Department of Education for providing technical assistance to local school districts and the analysis of legislative oversight. Consequently, the sub-teams sorted out their independent study processes and objectives and, at the same time, recognized the need to integrate the three streamings of work so that consistent study methods as well as conceptions of the task could be maintained. Furthermore, if they were effective in their task of evaluation of recent legislation, it was likely that some of their evaluation methods and techniques could be incorporated into subsequent oversight mechanisms and procedures.

Implicit in their approach has been the recognition of the severe needs for improved policy development processes at all governmental levels. There is growing investment in this country in policy research. The investment of new resources for this purpose to date, however, has not been based upon a clearly enunciated substantive theory of policy development. The work

that proceeds and the processes employed are rather conventional and often lack a disciplined methodology. In the team's judgment, some of the methods employed could well be incorporated into policy development processes. More will be said about this matter later in the report.

THE CONSULTANT TEAM

As indicated, the task assigned to the consultant team was divided into three parts. Sub-teams were selected to work on each. The evaluation of legislation was shared by five persons, led by Dr. Lawrence C. Pierce, Professor of Political Science, the University of Oregon. The other principal consultants were Dr. Miriam Clasby, Institute for Responsive Education, Boston; Dr. Robert J. Goettel, Associate Professor of Educational Administration and Policy, College of Education, State University of New York, Albany; Ms. Diana Thomason, Research Associate, University of California, Berkeley; and Dr. Lonnie Wagstaff, Professor of Educational Administration, The Ohio State University.

The examination and preparation of recommendations regarding the Florida Department of Education and its responsibilities for providing technical assistance was completed by Dr. Oron South, Visiting Professor, College of Education, Florida State University, and Dr. Dale Lake, Consultant, Severna Park, Maryland.

The analysis and preparation of recommendations regarding legislative oversight was the responsibility of Dr. Raphael O. Nystrand, Chairman of the Academic Faculty of Educational Administration, and Dr. Richard C. Snyder, Director of the Mershon Center, both at The Ohio State University.

The general consultant and coordinator of the team was Dr. Luvern L. Cunningham, Novice G. Fawcett Professor of Educational Administration, The Ohio State University. The on-site management of the project was the responsibility of Mr. Henry Cothran during the period of June through August 1977. Mr. Herman Myers served in that capacity from September 1977 through the project's completion.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES

FLORIDA 1977

by Miriam Clasby

with the assistance of

James Stanton

INTRODUCTION

Citizen participation in public education was one of the major components of the Governor's Citizens' Committee plan for improving public education in Florida. There were actually two ideas contained in the Committee's recommendation that school advisory councils should be mandated at each school. One was that school advisory councils or committees would improve the channels of communication between the public and their schools, thereby reducing public dissatisfaction or alienation from public schools. The second idea was that children would learn more if parents, through closer contact with their children's teachers, provided a more supportive educational environment in the home. It was strongly believed, in other words, that the quality of education would improve if parents and the public were more involved in activities of the local school.

In response to the Committee's recommendation, the Legislature in 1973 mandated what they called "school advisory committees" for every school district and made it optional for districts to establish advisory committees at each school. The Legislature also mandated that each school report annually on its status of education. The annual reports of school progress were to be prepared in cooperation with school advisory committees and distributed widely within the school community.

Since the 1973 legislation, school advisory committees have been established in many districts. They have not, however, emerged as an important partner in the decision-making structure of local schools. School advisory committees have also been plagued by

other problems: ambiguity of purpose and function; isolation, fragmentation, and overlap with the functions of other groups; inadequate orientation and information for citizen members; absence of support structures for both citizens and administrators; a climate rich in rhetoric but poor in practice. Whatever the level of legislative commitment to citizen participation in public schools, the techniques for translating policy into practice were not readily available, and it was therefore not reasonable to expect immediate success.

This chapter, which evaluates legislation establishing school advisory committees, is intended to improve understanding of both the potential and the problems of school advisory committees. It begins by examining advisory committees across the nation. It then turns to an analysis of school advisory committees in Florida.

SECTION 1

AN OVERVIEW OF SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES: THE NATIONAL EXPERIENCE

This analysis of the national experience with school advisory committees or councils rests on two assumptions that should be made explicit: (1) in a democratic society such as ours, laws are shaped to insure broad popular representation in decision making and government; and (2) effective citizen organizations are important means for citizens to participate in government and share authority with elected office holders and professional

administrators. Assessments of school committees will, therefore, reflect these basic assumptions.

In this section, school advisory councils or school advisory committees (SAC) refer to government-mandated, school-based groups with school building, area, or district geographic scope. The word citizen refers to parents and other adult residents of a community, normally excluding students, professional educators, and school staff. Participation, as used here, means taking part in activities in order to exercise power or influence--to have impact on decision making in policy matters. Certain confusions inevitably arise because much that is called participation involves little or no power or influence. Where possible, the term involvement will be used where there is no clear intent to exercise power or to have an effect on decision making. The focus is on general purpose committees as distinct from special purpose groups (such as special education, bilingual education, or Title I).

Many state and federal policymakers look to school committees to contribute to three important objectives: decreasing citizen cynicism, apathy, mistrust of government and public institutions, and restiveness about their costs; combatting growing centralization and professional and bureaucratic control of schools; and improving the quality of schools. There is ample evidence that citizen participation can contribute importantly to the attainment of such objectives when participation is bona fide and includes citizens sharing power in decision making and policy

setting. The great increase of government-mandated citizen participation in schools, however, may well only form what Congresswoman Barbara Jordan calls "a network of illusions," leading to further alienation of the citizenry. This effort to distinguish between rhetoric and reality briefly summarizes recent developments at the federal, state, and local levels.

IMPACT OF FEDERAL ACTION

The complex, cumulative, and continuing federal presence and impact on public education is nowhere felt with greater force than in the area of citizen participation. In this, as in many other spheres, federal actions fix the agenda and establish the tone and pattern for states and local districts. "Advisory committees" are the predominant mode of the federal mandate for citizen participation--a muted version of the 1960's call for maximum feasible participation in decision making by those served by federal programs.

Structures

Nearly all school-related bills and regulations enacted since the early 1970's have included mandates for citizen consulting and advisory mechanisms. Of 106 Office of Education programs, 77 have a participatory component. Eight current United States Office of Education (USOE) programs require a continuing advisory committee at the local level. These require district-wide

committees, except for Title I which requires both individual school building and district groups. The sheer number of federally mandated advisory councils is impressive. There are approximately 14,000 district-level Title I Parent Advisory Committees and 44,000 building-level committees with approximately 900,000 members. Head Start, Follow Through, and other district and building committees account for at least 150,000 additional participants. Field observations confirm that such proliferation tends to work counter to an increased share of power in decision making for citizens. The number of separate advisory committees mandated by federal programs produces confusion, a drain on limited resources and time, as well as some intercommittee conflict. There is no recognition in any legislation or regulation of the possibility of overlapping, duplicative, or contradictory participatory requirements and no suggestions as to how conflicts among advisory groups, school administrators, and school boards are to be addressed and resolved.

Functions/Impact

All United States Office of Education programs reflect a clear policy that citizen councils or committees should be advisory in function. The only exception to this policy among education programs is Head Start, administered by the Office of Human Development, which vests policy control in citizen boards. Otherwise, laws and regulations stress membership requirements and committee composition. They are often detailed and prescriptive on these points, but invariably vague and general in regard to functions, authority, and conditions of operation.

Federal programs and their citizen adivsory mechanisms tend to operate as a relatively closed and separate system in state departments of education and in large school districts. Advisory committee concerns and activities are tightly focused on the single federal program under which they are mandated. Influence, where it is reported, is limited to the specific program. The effectiveness of federally mandated committees varies widely and is strongly influenced by political variables--the history and tradition of politics and decision making in school and community; intergroup relations in a school, district, or state. The political context affects state agency staff members and school district central office staff and building administrators who set the conditions which encourage or discourage various citizen roles, activities, and influence.

Many federally mandated advisory committees appear to exist only on paper, while many others appear to be controlled by school officials or to devote themselves largely to non-policy-related, school-support activities. Few appear to be effective in influencing school policies concerning budget, program, or personnel.

Support

Several laws and regulations make specific reference to the needs or rights of committees for information, training, or assistance. Only in rare exceptions do the citizen groups indicate they believe they are given adequate help, information, or

training. Furthermore, few mechanisms are established to monitor or evaluate progress.

OTHER FEDERAL INFLUENCES

In addition to direct programmatic efforts, other federal actions and requirements have strong effects on citizen participation. Here we cite just two examples. First, reporting and administrative requirements appear to have a strong centralizing influence on urban school districts. Local administrative bureaucracies for federal programs are typically centralized and related to equally centralized state and federal bureaucracies. This three-level model of bureaucratic control establishes a structure that again seems to work strongly against any substantial impact by local citizens.

Second, federal laws and court decisions have broadened the rights of parents and have triggered significant changes in the ways in which educational institutions relate to young people and their families. In addition, federal court decisions have stimulated organized citizen activity for and against desegregation and busing, as well as modes of citizen involvement in schools under court-ordered desegregation.

STATE-LEVEL IMPACT

While the federal impact in nearly all aspects of education, including citizen participation, has grown steadily, there has also been a quiet revolution which has transformed state government and resulted in substantially increased capacity in executive as well as legislative branches. This 50-year trend of escalating

state power is strikingly seen in the area of education. Initiatives have been exerted not only in policy formation, but in oversight and control. A number of these activities have direct impact on citizen participation. Since 1950, for example, state intervention to reduce the number of public school districts (from 84,000 in 1950 to 16,000 in 1976) has increased the number of constituents each school board member represents. More recently, approximately two-thirds of the states have approved some form of state collective bargaining legislation for teachers and other public employees. Adapting a private-sector, bilateral model of bargaining to the public sector has tended to increase the power of employee organizations while decreasing public access to policy influence. Finally, state school finance reform to equalize intrastate public school funding tends to lead to states' assuming a larger portion of the costs of operating public schools. Pressures will exist also to increase state impact on all aspects of local school affairs, although some state policymakers are seeking ways to maintain substantial local initiative and control by increasing the capacity of local school boards, initiating school based management, or increasing management skills of local administrators. These legislative actions are paralleled by a decade of change in state departments of education as they have developed new technical competencies for data gathering, planning, and management functions. Typically, departments of education have substantially increased both staff numbers and staff functions in a relatively short period of time.

Structures

State-level initiatives for citizen participation are reported in a survey conducted in 1977 by the Institute for Responsive Education and the Education Commission of the States. The 27 states responding to requests for information included representation from each of the ten federal regions, urban industrial settings as well as rural. Twenty-two states reported some type of state board or state education agency activity to encourage citizen participation. Both the amount and type of activity vary widely from the simple creation of state-level advisory groups to widespread planning efforts. Characteristically, the state board or agency encourages or requires consultation with the community in the conduct of studies or development of plans.

More significantly, 17 states reported some type of legislation enacted since 1970 related to public participation in education. Some laws create state-level advisory committees, typically composed of professionals, interest group representatives, and elite citizens. Four states--California, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Rhode Island--have enacted legislation creating local-level advisory groups for bilingual or special education. Other states, such as New Jersey, South Dakota, Virginia, North Carolina, Texas, and West Virginia, mandate citizen participation in planning or evaluating school programs, without specifying a council or committee structure for the activity. Colorado, Florida, and California have moved the farthest and fastest toward establishing

a statewide structure of school advisory councils. South Carolina has initiated a similar objective this year, requiring the establishment of councils in all schools by January 1978.

Functions/Impact

State laws typically emphasize either function (such as participation in goals setting/needs assessment activities with little attention to continuity or follow up) or structures--establishment of councils or committees with heavy emphasis on membership requirements and minimal specifications for functions.

Both the newness of the initiatives and the lack of systematic documentation make it difficult to draw conclusions concerning the impact of these policies. There are indicators, however, that implementation is at best uneven and at worst window dressing.

Support

State initiatives rarely include provisions for information, access to information, technical assistance, operating budgets, or staff responsible to the group. Furthermore, minimal attention is given to documentation of the experience or evaluation of results.

THE GRASS ROOTS EXPERIENCE

Although many councils exist only on paper and membership lists are often inflated and inaccurate, we estimate that there are now nearly one and one-quarter million non-professional members of various school councils and educational advisory committees throughout the country at local district or school level. Nearly all of these councils have been created since 1970, and there are no national data on composition, selection, or functioning.

At least three factors account for the data gaps. First, few local schools or even school districts keep accurate records on participants. Second, to date there have been no attempts nationally by either governmental, professional, or citizen-interest groups to obtain this information. Finally, in many schools and districts, council mechanisms are, by definition, an open-ended process; many councils experience moderate to high turnover within a school year and from year to year. However, by drawing on data from relatively well-kept records, on observations and impressions of staff and other observers, we can make some informed judgments on council performance and functions.

Structures

Members gain seats by selection, election, or volunteering. Many councils appear to use a combination of the three methods. Federally-mandated councils are supposedly elected, although there is evidence that this requirement is not always fulfilled. The dominant mode for state and locally-initiated groups is selection by principals or sometimes by the superintendent or school board.

Perceptions on the representativeness of council members vary widely. Council members frequently see themselves as reflecting the immediate school community, while outsiders do not. Most data suggest that councils are unrepresentative of at least one (and perhaps all) of the following groups: community members other than parents; minorities; low-income parents/citizens; students; and males (except in leadership positions).

In city after city, there are indications (but little hard data) that councils are not very stable bodies. Those members perceived as "professional parents" have some permanence, but high turnover rates (estimated from 25% to 50%) apply to the most active as well as the nominal members. Councils, then, tend to be composed of many new members and are likely to repeat many of the same mistakes year after year.

A survey by the National School Public Relations Association and information from Portland, Los Angeles, Miami, and Boston provide strong evidence that all but a handful of councils meet only once per month. While councils may have subcommittees that meet more frequently, there is little evidence that this happens.

Functions/Impact

Councils typically have advisory powers and responsibilities, but the term "advisory" is open to an almost infinite number of interpretations. For discussion purposes, it is possible to identify three distinct types of involvement in terms of scope of authority:

Token. Councils are controlled by administrators to serve the ends of school administration, not council members or parents. Few council activities focus on improving knowledge, understanding, or capabilities of members. There is no transfer of power to the council.

Three specific examples of this type of involvement are:

1. Rubber Stamp Involvement: the administration presents recommendations to a council, fully expecting adoption or approval.
2. Shock Absorber Involvement: school officials avoid responsibility for decision making in a crucial situation by using the council as a buffer.
3. Public Relations Involvement: council involvement is carefully restricted to trivial and tangential concerns. School officials concentrate on one-way communication; councils are assigned a passive and dependent consumer role designed to support professional autonomy.

Advisory. Councils make some input or give some advice, though the final authority to act inevitably rests elsewhere. Participation is continuing rather than sporadic and provides a formal channel for review and recommendations. Advisory councils can select activities within limits and arrange them in priority on their agenda. Council activity serves ends and goals determined by the council, and the council has the power and resources to see that there is a reasonable chance that the advice it gives may be acted on.

Partnership. The council can select and arrange in priority order the issues it will focus on. On a substantial number of issues, the council has authority to make the final decision or see that the final decision maker acts as it directs. Still, the

council may not infringe on the authority delegated by law to a local school board; it must also work in conformity with state and federal laws.

Nationally the dominant style of council operation is token involvement. It is more difficult to make judgments on councils which fit the definition of advisory participation because little data exists on the quantity and quality of recommendations made by councils and the extent to which the recommendations are acted on. Councils which do fit this description of advisory bodies are often found in alternative schools such as the Southeast Alternative in Minneapolis. Some Title I Parent Advisory Committees also, in fact, are genuine and working examples of the advisory model. There are some Title I Parent Advisory Committees, both district and school site level, which have had direct impact on Title I personnel selection, budget, and program priorities.

Examples of councils which reflect a shared partnership are even rarer. There are no more than a handful of councils in the country which have achieved parity with educators in decision making. Foremost among the schools and programs with this type of participation are the Federal Urban/Rural Development Program, the Southeast Alternative in Minneapolis, Roosevelt School in Louisville, Build Academy of Buffalo, the Sand Everywhere School in Hartford, the Alternative Public School in Cambridge, and the Morgan School in Washington, D.C. Substantial citizen participation in the schools and programs is stated in school policy and practices on a day-to-day basis.

While evidence is fragmentary, it suggests a general national pattern: much token involvement, little real advice, and even fewer instances of partnership. School board policies invariably define the activities of school councils. The most permissive policies encourage councils to conduct independent studies of school problems and to draw conclusions for presentation to school officials. More restrictive policies make it clear that councils can do little without encroaching on the authority of duly constituted school authorities.

Arenas for Action

Before turning to the Florida experience with school advisory committees, it may be useful to indicate specific arenas of committee functioning. Committee activities commonly address six types of school-related issues:

1. Critical Organizational Issues (budget, personnel, curriculum/program):

   These issues are critical to school functions, yet information from several surveys indicates that most councils do not address these substantive policy areas: selection and evaluation of the principal and staff, setting budget priorities, reviewing and approving the budget, approving new school programs, reviewing and assessing curriculum. Principals are genuinely concerned about minimizing participation in areas traditionally considered subject to management prerogative.

2. Planning and Evaluation (needs assessment, goal setting, evaluation, and information acquisition):
These constitute the most common activities of councils, and administrators seem willing to support this type of involvement. As a rule, however, planning becomes an issue for council action only when someone, usually an administrator, sees or anticipates an impending crisis. Attention focuses almost exclusively on immediate and short-term issues.

3. School System Organization (decentralization, desegregation):
As pressures for desegregation and decentralization have grown, so too has the role of councils. In desegregation they play the essential role of monitoring progress of desegregation plans in schools. In decentralization the councils are supposed to assist building administrators in making school-level decisions. Redistribution of power to councils, however, is seldom real.

4. School Climate (discipline, student rights and responsibilities, building conditions):
Policies affecting the physical and emotional welfare of students frequently appear in guidelines as appropriate topics for councils, and the data available indicate significant activity in this area. Public involvement in building conditions is also encouraged by principals.

5. Extra Educational Issues (safety, zoning, transportation, after-school use of the building):
   These issues also appear as areas of high activity. Given the policymaking limitations otherwise placed on councils, it is not surprising that there is moderate to high interest among members in these areas.
6. School/Community Relations (developing support for school communication with the community, advising staff about community conditions and expectations):
   Principals have a high interest in this area. They want the community to feel that all is well with the school, and they want an "early warning system" as problems start brewing. There are indications that community representatives are becoming increasingly restive with this role. Some council members view themselves as representatives of the community, not as support builders for the school as administrators sometimes see them.

This list omits school service areas such as volunteering and fund raising because councils are not defined here as service organizations. Volunteering is frequently handled either administratively or by a separate program. In many places, the PTA continues to function as the primary service organization. Principals generally have a moderately high self-interest in service roles for citizens, while council members seem to have decreasing interest in this function.

Activities related to council organization, structure, resources, and support, however, constitute a separate arena for action. It is not unusual for councils to spend much of the early part of the year dealing with their own organizational and structural issues. This intense focusing on organization is based on the illusion that there is a formula to council success and the key to such effectiveness is spending time developing internal structures. The situation is, in fact, just the opposite. There is evidence that most councils lack effective leadership to quickly resolve even marginal internal housekeeping matters. In addition, some principals are willing to have councils spend an inordinate amount of time on minor organizational issues, perhaps as a way of preventing them from dealing with more significant matters. At any rate, it is clear that time spend on such concerns is time not spent on more important issues. Unfortunately, a curious pattern of "reinventing the wheel" occurs each year over internal organization matters.

Support

Little attention is given to providing resources and support for school councils, although there is growing evidence that such supports enhance the ability of councils to function effectively. At the present time, support generally means one-time training sessions or services heavily controlled by the administration. There are few examples of support systems aimed to develop self-consciousness and independent expertise as a citizens' institution.

The key person in council operations is the principal. In

addition to holding important powers over appointment or nomination, principals have wide discretion in shaping day-to-day activities of the council. It is possible for principals to use their delegated authority to firmly establish their dominance (through subtle rather than bold tactics) and to limit the scope of council action. This position may be reinforced in professional publications, where administrators are urged to assume a role of total control and placation. Principals sometimes see councils as of little or no value in the overall operation of the school and point to problems of public apathy, lack of community leaders, or, on the other hand, public takeover of the school. So many times principals are generally perceived by the public to be the major reason for the lack of citizen participation in schools or for council effectiveness.

Although the relationship of school boards to councils is less well documented, most school boards do not see councils as high priorities. Initiatives for councils usually come from professional educators who assume main responsibility for interacting with the councils. School boards frequently receive information on councils only through administrative channels. School board members have expressed three types of concerns:

1. That councils, if unchecked, may encroach on board prerogatives and responsibilities.
2. That councils are little more than a political "farm system" for aspiring public servants.
3. That there are few ways in which councils can be helpful or constructive.

This absence of an alliance between citizens at the board and council levels is striking in a time of public concern over the quality of education. Given the potential of councils for providing valuable first-hand information, for monitoring certain problems, and for making decisions at the school building level, the negative reaction from board members seems puzzling.

This national picture, then, sets the context within which Florida initiated the councils which are called in Florida school advisory committees. Citizen groups mandated by federal, state, and local education agencies have been plagued by problems: ambiguity of purpose and function; isolation, fragmentation, and overlap with the functions of other groups; inadequate orientation and information for citizen members; absence of support structures for both citizens and administrators; a climate which is rich in rhetoric but poor in practice. Without a ready-made formula for developing effective, general-purpose committees, implementation of the Florida legislative mandate inevitably required slow, developmental efforts as local school districts tested a variety of models and approaches. Whatever the level of commitment, techniques for translating policy into practice were not readily available, and it was not reasonable to expect immediate results.

SECTION 2

THE FLORIDA EXPERIENCE: STATE-LEVEL ACTION

Section II of the report by the Governor's Citizens' Committee on Education deals with "The Community and the School." The purpose of this section's recommendations was to improve public confidence in the schools by strengthening participation at the individual school. Several points in the discussion preceding the recommendations, however, deserve special attention because they articulate the intentions of the recommendations.

> (The Advisory Councils) should function as an advisory group to the principal and in general should work with him on the development of budget, program, personnel policy and to improve the quality of education.
>
> One of the most important functions of the SAC would be assisting the principal in preparation of the Annual Report of School Progress, detailed below. The School Advisory Council would thus have responsibility for evaluating the school's education effectiveness and reporting this to parents, students, and the public at large in a plain, simple, easily read manner.
>
> The individual school should be the basic unit of educational accountability in Florida. To achieve this accountability, there should be an Annual Report of School Progress which details the improvements made in education at the school during the year--and which identifies the areas in need of further improvement. Serving as a basic performance audit instrument, hopefully, the Annual Report will become a power tool for achieving school level improvements and innovations.

School advisory committees were to advise the principal on central administrative issues and to use the annual report as a vehicle for evaluating school effectiveness. This statement serves as a touchstone for the following description of Florida state-level action which is based primarily on official documents.

FROM RECOMMENDATIONS TO LEGISLATION

The legislative history of what in the final legislation were called "school advisory committees" is outlined in a 1974 report by the staff of the Florida Senate Education Committee:

> The initial Education Committee approach was to construct a bill which was in keeping with the spirit and intent of the Citizens' Committee recommendations--that is, one which guaranteed an optimum degree of parental input and participation at the local school level by specifying certain crucial advisory functions to be assumed by each council. In contrast, a weaker version encompassed those legislative counter-proposals or amendments which sought to restrict both the degree and kind of parental input at the local school level by investing with the district school board discretionary power over planning and establishing these councils.
>
> A major subject of debate between proponents of the weak and the strong versions involved the extent of the state's role in education vis-a-vis the local school board's. The two main concrete issues commanding attention were whether there should be mandated one council per school, and what was the proper scope of the advisory powers to be afforded these councils. School board members, superintendents and the PTA were not generally friendly toward the concept of councils and so the bill as passed, a weaker substitute version, mandated only that each district school board establish at least one school advisory committee and the committee, or committees would not have any of the powers and duties reserved by law to the school board. It was also given to the school boards the prerogative to develop a plan for establishing each committee, provided that such plan guaranteed that parents and students be members, and that it be broadly representative of the community served by the school. The duties and functions of any committee are prescribed by the school board, provided that said committee participate with the appropriate school personnel in the development of an annual report of school progress. The bill also provided that the school board evaluate the effectiveness of the committee or committees and submit to the state department of education a copy of its evaluation. The department was instructed to provide to the State Board of Education and the Legislature an annual appraisal of the effectiveness of these committees based on the district-level evaluations.

The provision for the option of district-level committees was one of the compromises necessary to pass the law. Deeper problems, however, focusing on the notion of "state leadership" are also inherent in the law. A number of legislators supported a move away from heavily prescriptive laws which they perceived as a burden on local administrators. They looked instead to a state leadership role which emphasized accountability for educational output rather than input; local districts would have flexibility in defining objectives and freedom in selecting means to achieve them. But the laws did not lay adequate groundwork for such an alternate definition of state leadership.

The legislation of 1973 reflected three basic assumptions: (1) that implementation of legislation does not require clear statement of and general understanding of legislative intent; (2) that support systems necessary for implementation can be developed without further guidelines; and (3) that costs entailed can be absorbed without additional funding. The 1973 mandate for school advisory committees,* included as one of the general powers of school boards, made no reference to the needs or purposes described in the Governor's Citizens' Committee Report. The mandate for the annual report of school progress** telescoped major new policies into two broad sentences describing legislative intent:

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* Section 230.22

**Section 228.165

> It is the intent of the Legislature that the individual public school should be the basic unit of accountability in Florida. It is further the intent of the Legislature to assure that each parent or guardian be informed of the educational progress of the school and be aware of areas in need of further improvement.

Both advisory committees and annual reports were components of a new locally-based model of educational accountability, but the legislation made no provisions for further articulation of the legislative intent or for dissemination of the rationale for the new model. Although the model is designed to transform basic operating procedures of the educational system, the legislation provided no additional resources for making necessary transitions.

The changes introduced in the 1976 law did not eliminate any of these problems. The Educational Accountability Act, which consolidated and refined various initiatives, opened with an extended statement of intent. The six items identified a range of general goals for the educational system: accountability, equity, efficiency, and effectiveness. The global statements did not refer to public participation in decision making, and no reference was made to the school as the principal planning unit until a later section on educational planning.* Specifications for annual reports and advisory committees appeared at the end of the section, following elaboration of state functions--management; planning and information systems; research and development evaluation, testing, and reporting procedures. These specifications--the paragraphs typically used if citizens receive

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* Section 229.555 (1) (b)

orientation to committee roles--are far removed from the statement of intent.

Furthermore, only minor changes in substance were made. Advisory committees were authorized to provide "such assistance as the principal may request in preparing the school's annual budget and plan." The requirement that school boards conduct an annual evaluation of advisory committees was eliminated. The statement of intent originally preceding the specifications for the annual report was removed. Except for assigning the Department of Education responsibility for reviewing committees and annual reports, no other references to committees or their functions were made. Neither the legislative language nor the provisions of the 1976 Educational Accountability Act helped to alleviate the original problems of lack of clarity of intent or the absence of support structures.

The new state policy stance, under the rubric of flexibility and freedom, required both citizens and educators to take on new roles and responsibilities--without orientation or training, without ongoing support, without a reward system, and without funding. In the end, the shift simply substituted a new model of "government by fiat" for an older one. Furthermore, the ambiguities surrounding the shift to local accountability inhibited the capacity of the State Department of Education to be helpful.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ROLE

The reluctance of legislators to prescribe local behaviors

had repercussions within the Department of Education, where relationships with districts were marked by uncertainty and ambivalence. Two patterns emerged: the intitial timid involvement of the Department of Education in 1973 became even more limited by 1976; and in 1974 and 1975, legislative staff members carried out more extensive data-gathering, reporting, and analysis than the Department of Education staff. The 1973 law called for the Department of Education to review evaluations of school advisory committees. There was no provision for additional staffing to carry out these new department responsibilities, and the task was assigned to the Student Assessment Section of the then Bureau of Evaluation and Compensatory Education. The Department issued a two-page set of guidelines indicating responsibilities of each school board to: develop a plan for establishing the committee, create at least one advisory committee, prescribe the function of the committee, carry out an annual evaluation of the effectiveness of the committee. By January 15, 1974, all counties had submitted the required plan.

To carry out the requirement for an annual evaluation, the Department also issued a two-page form covering five areas:

1. Committee composition
2. Meetings (frequency, number held, average attendance, and length)
3. Response of the public, school personnel, and school board to the advisory committee

4. Recommendations by the advisory committees

5. Effectiveness of committees.

The evaluation form was to be signed by each chairman of an advisory committee.

Staff members of the Department of Education prepared a hand-tabulated summary and evaluation of the data returns for the first year of implementation. The report noted the limitations of the data gathered through forms when there was no check on the accuracy of the responses and no common agreement on what constituted effectiveness of committees. (One respondent even strongly warned that the estimates of effectiveness made at higher echelons were highly inflated.) The report made two recommendations. The first urged that the responsibility for evaluation be assigned to principals rather than to school boards. The second addressed the problem of the role of the state agency:

> The Department of Education has taken a "hands off" approach in this first year of operation for school advisory committees. The Department of Education has responded to requests for help in establishing these committees and has made trips to districts for this purpose. The Department of Education has attempted to avoid providing greater structure for school advisory committees than is provided for in the law.
>
> If the Department of Education is to provide greater support for school districts, it will require the appointment of a full-time staff member to work with these groups. The staff member would have responsibility for meeting and working with school advisory committees, disseminating information on effectiveness of these committees, and conducting training sessions for chairmen and other members of school advisory committees.

For the following year, no recommendations were attached to the "1974-75 Report to the Legislature: Effectiveness of School

Advisory Committee(s)" which was a brief two-page update of information gathered through the same reporting form used in 1973-74.

Concurrent with the initial report of the Department of Education, the staff of the Senate Education Committee produced a computer-tabulated report on advisory committees based on a random sample of committee members. After identifying problems related to composition, functioning, and communications, the report proposed such actions as "the establishment of a statewide clearinghouse to facilitate dissemination of information to the public and encourage intercommittee communication." The available evidence indicates that no action was taken on the recommendations of either the Department of Education or the legislative staff. Currently, no Department of Education staff person is assigned responsibility for reviewing school advisory committees.

A somewhat similar pattern can be seen in handling annual reports of school progress. Responsibility for developing guidelines for preparation of the annual report was assigned jointly to the Bureau of Research and Information and the then Bureau of Evaluation and Compensatory Education. After review by bureau chiefs in the Division of Elementary and Secondary Education, a final draft was submitted to the State Board of Education. Guidelines were officially issued in the fall of 1973. The Department of Education held several seminars for superintendents and/or district staff to discuss the annual report.

After a year of implementation, a Staff Program Review, pre-

pared in cooperation with the Eagleton Institute of Politics, was presented to the House of Representatives. Thirteen recommendations were proposed, most addressed to the Department of Education. Recommendations concerning guidelines (inclusion of data on suspensions and expulsions and a fall rather than June reporting date) have been implemented. Those proposing an expanded role for the Department of Education (annual monitoring of a sampling of reports; analytic rather than descriptive studies of reports) apparently have not been implemented. At present, no person is currently assigned responsibility for reviewing annual reports.

Despite the minimal formal involvement of the Department of Education, two examples illustrate types of non-directive agency support. At the request of the District Superintendent of Monroe County Schools, the Department of Education participated in a two-day workshop on school advisory committees.* The program outlined state and district policies and school system organization. The Director of the Learning Resources Center described duties and functions of school advisory committees. This type of orientation deserves special attention because both field interviews and documentation confirmed that two school districts (Monroe and Dade) which had received external funding for support services made significant progress in committee functioning (despite wide variations in geographic and demographic features).

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*September 27-28, 1974.

Agency meetings with professional groups and associations provided another kind of informal support. In a seminar for new superintendents in 1976, for example, a Department of Education official outlined staff-level actions to implement state educational policies, referring in the process to activities for involving the public. In this case, public participation was placed in the full policy context as well as in the context of emerging trends influencing schools.

Both the Legislature and the Department of Education were facing a problem of policy implementation which is neither new nor trivial. The problem is seen in its starkest form in the 24-year history of efforts to achieve compliance with the 1954 Brown decision. A policy, based on fundamental constitutional rights, was announced with implementation left solely to enforcement agencies and the media. More than two decades of incomplete compliance have demonstrated the difficulty of using such procedures for implementation of public policy.

The effort of Florida legislators to develop a new mode of leadership merits special attention because of its basic importance and because it poses two serious questions: If local districts are to be responsible for translating general policy into practice and designing procedures for implementation, what procedures are necessary in the formulation of that general policy and what follow-up activities are required to facilitate compliance?

The evidence gathered for this report highlights critical problems in implementation emerging primarily from lack of involvement of those responsible for implementation. The procedures

provided no incentives for school boards, central administrators, or principals to invest in implementation. Even the benefits to citizens were not clearly articulated. Knowing what is known now, it is possible not only to identify the problem areas, but to identify a pattern or sequence that might have obviated the problems at the beginning and that can now point to "next steps" to remedy existing gaps. Five steps can be identified:

1. Involvement of all parties affected in the formulation of the policy or legislation.
2. Identification of parties who will play a role in further elaboration and implementation of policies.
3. Identification of barriers raised by parties at various points in the system.
4. Identification of appropriate remedies to eliminate barriers.
5. Monitoring and evaluating the process for feedback to all parties.

The first step represents an ideal--not easily achieved and enormously time-consuming. If this step had been taken, legislation would never have been enacted in 1973. A trade-off has to be made, however, between immediate decree of a policy which will have spotty implementation and a long, slow process of policy formation which has greater likelihood of long-term effectiveness. Both the strengths and weaknesses of local-level implementation described in the following section should be viewed in the light of precarious beginnings.

SECTION 3

LOCAL-LEVEL IMPLEMENTATION: FINDINGS

This report on local-level implementation of legislation for school advisory committees and annual reports of school progress draws on several different data sources collected between August 1, 1977, and December 20, 1977: (1) a brief survey of each of the 67 districts; (2) an in-depth survey of 287 local committee chairpersons and principals; (3) field interviews with 88 local participants; (4) content analyses of annual reports of school progress and policy statements and guidelines for school advisory committees from 36 districts. An effort was made to collect information parallel to that presented in the 1974 survey of school advisory committees conducted by the staff of the Senate Education Committee. Although in some cases results are strikingly similar, because of differing methodologies the comparisons reveal general trends rather than definitive conclusions.

Field data are organized here into three categories:

1. School advisory committee: types and composition.
2. School advisory committee: functions.
3. Annual reports of school progress and public communication.

The research questions guiding the data collection are presented at the beginning of each section with a brief summary of the findings.

SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHARACTERISTICS

Research Questions

Has the 1973 legislation for school advisory committees strengthened participation at the individual school? Are any trends apparent in the types of committees established? How is council membership determined, and what evidence is there that the committees are representative?

Summary of Findings

Since 1974, the number of school districts providing for individual school councils has risen from 29 to 47. This indicates a substantial increase in the quantity of participation at the individual school level. There is a trend toward multi-tiered councils rather than a single type of council within a district.

The majority of committee members are appointed; principals (and occasionally superintendents) control appointments by a margin of two to one over school boards. Although the number of citizens volunteering for such appointments seems to be increasing, committees continue to be highly selective rather than broadly representative. There is need for broad dissemination of successful procedures for improving committee representativeness and for some form of district accountability for monitoring selection procedures.

Numbers and Types of Committees

In 1974, 29 districts reported plans for committees at the

school level, while 38 districts had selected the option for district-wide committees. In 1977, the pattern shows substantial changes, as can be seen in the following tables:

TABLE 3-1: Districts with School-Level Committees (1977)

School Only	27
Area-School	3
District-School	12
District-Area-School	5
	47

TABLE 3-2: Districts with No School-Level Committees (1977)

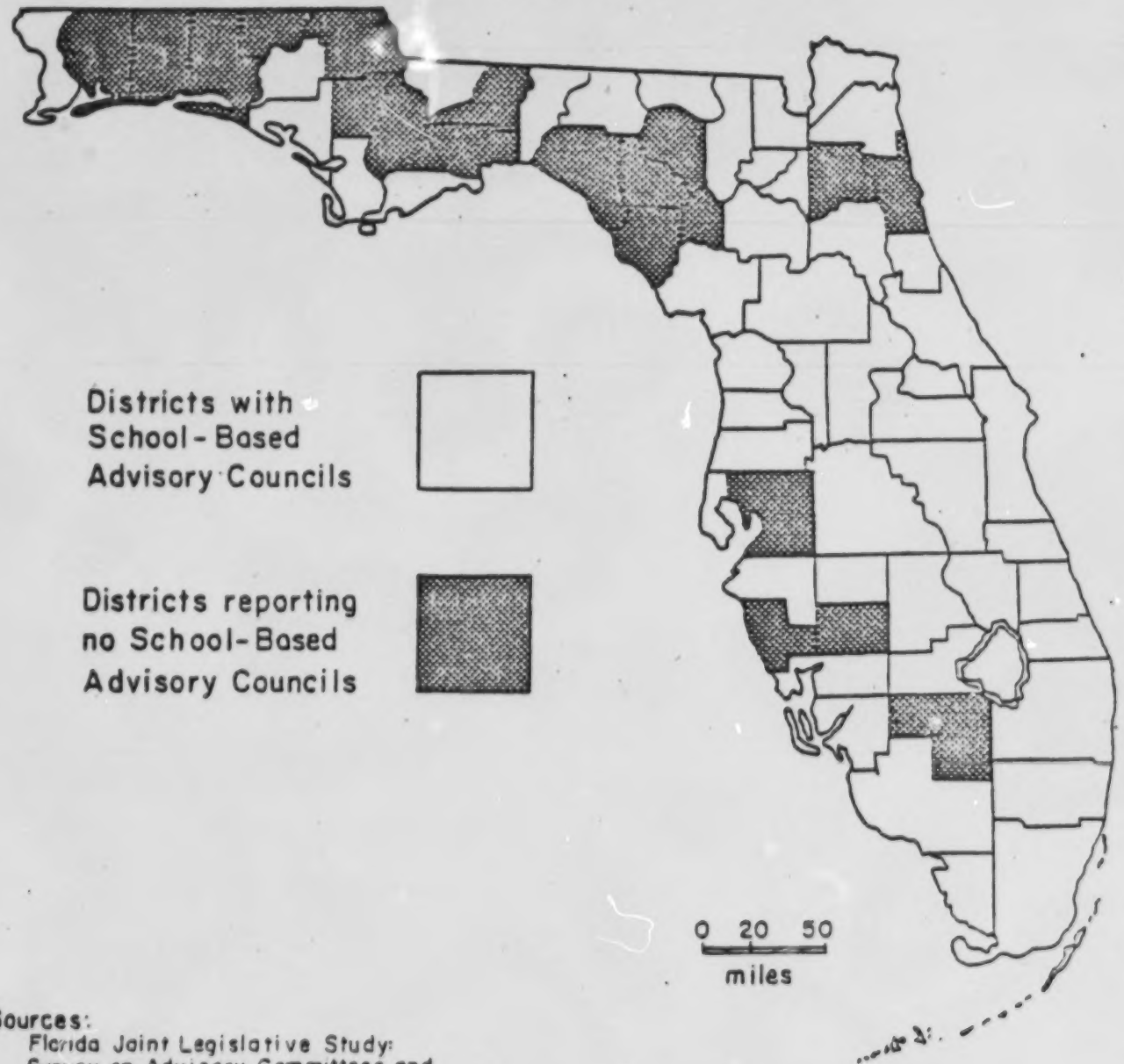
Area Only	1
District Only	16
No Councils	3
	20

The number of districts providing for school-level committees has increased by 61 percent since 1974. In only one case did a district revert from a school-level council to a district-level organization.

The geographical distribution of districts with local-level committees is portrayed in Figures 3-1 and 3-2 (pp. 249 and 250). School-level committees are established in large urban as well as small rural districts. Only 2 of the 13 districts with more than 25,000 students do not have school-level committees. The categorization "school-level" does not necessarily mean that each school in the district has a committee; principals are still the single most influential figure in determining whether a school in these districts has a council. This increase in the number of

FIGURE 3-1

STATUS OF SCHOOL-BASED ADVISORY COUNCILS in Florida County Districts, 1976-77

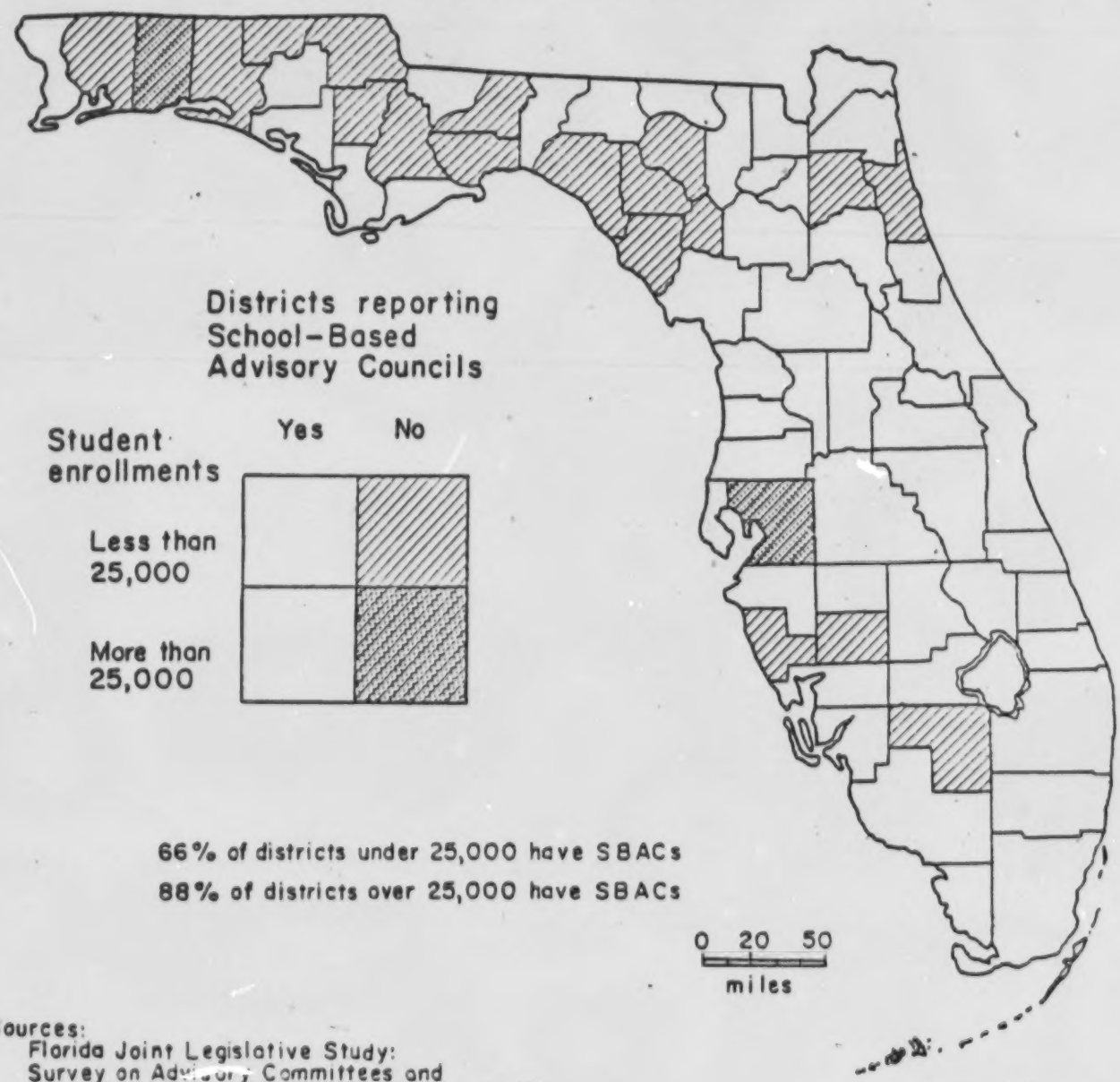


Sources:
Florida Joint Legislative Study:
Survey on Advisory Committees and
Annual Reports of School Progress, 1977
U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970 Florida map

Carroll

FIGURE 3-2

STATUS OF SCHOOL-BASED ADVISORY COUNCILS in Florida County Districts, 1976-77



Sources:
Florida Joint Legislative Study:
Survey on Advisory Committees and
Annual Reports of School Progress, 1977
U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1970 Florida map

individual school committees is significant for several reasons. First, it indicates a voluntary shift toward the type of organization identified in the 1973 Citizens' Committee Report as the most effective way to increase public involvement in the school. The options provided by the legislation have successfully opened the way to the intended goal. These increases also coincide with related efforts to make the individual school building the unit of accountability. Finally, it signals a weakening of resistance to committees on the part of principals and PTA's (although the reasons for this are not actually clear).

One other trend can be identified. In 21 districts, there are provisions for committees at more than one level (school, area, and/or district). During the past three years, 13 districts had shifted from a single-level to a multi-level organization, while only four have reduced a multi-level organization to a single-level one.

Field observations indicated that the presence of more than one level of committee generally enhanced the effectiveness of both groups. Most, but not all, interviews confirmed this observation. Assuming that the type of committee organization reflects specific features of a school district, there seems little reason to pressure districts to move to school-level organization at this time or to prescribe levels of organization.

Official documents--policy statements, administrative guidelines, constitutions, and by-laws--developed at the district level give extensive treatment to specifications for membership

(as well as for removal from membership). A review of documents from 33 districts, however, tells little about what actually happens in practice. Two examples illustrate the limits of formal statements:

1. The written policy of one district indicates that appointments to committees are made by the school board. Field visits revealed that, more recently in this district, appointments are made by principals without formal board approval.
2. Six districts indicate that committees are elected. Although two of these are "elected" by the school board, four provide for election by peers or PTA. However, a cross-check with survey data revealed that 8 of 10 respondents from those four districts reported that they were appointed.

Although written statements may serve as a guide to general patterns of operation, they reveal little of local-level experience.

Committee Appointment Procedures

Some shifts in appointment processes seem to be emerging. In 1974, 85 percent of committee members surveyed reported they were appointed, while 15 percent stated they were elected. In the 1977 survey, 56 percent of the respondents reported that members were appointed.

TABLE 3-3. Methods of Selection for Committee Members (1977)

	Appointment	Volunteer	Election
Present Method (reported by chairpersons)	56%	23%	13%
Preferred for Future			
Chairpersons	34	35	25
Principals	39	48	7

Field site visits revealed some ambiguity in these categories. Some principals indicated that they invited all parents to volunteer before making final appointments, so that a combination of methods was used. In other cases, committees were clearly "vest pocket" groups, carefully selected school supporters. Some principals followed an unwritten policy of replacing the committee each year with new members; others invited the executive board of the PTA to function as the committee; still others simply checked to see that each geographic division was represented. Five of the 1977 survey forms addressed to chairpersons were completed by principals. Although principals have exercised strong control in determining council membership, a majority of chairpersons--and principals--prefer some other method of selection.

On the surface, volunteering appears to be an open and legitimate process and one that is gaining popularity. Yet, there are critical problems related to this process which can allow small, self-selected cliques to form and become dominant. In addition, volunteer committees tend to have no definable constituency to which they are accountable.

Although elections are the most democratic form of selection,

three strong countervailing forces prevent election from being widespread:

1. There is a strong sentiment emerging among parents that volunteering is the "purest" means of finding out who really wants to expend time and energy.
2. Principals clearly want to determine who constitutes the committee and thus what does or does not get done.
3. Experience with elections to date shows that they are vastly more complicated than many anticipated in terms of prior publicity, overseeing balloting, attracting candidates with a substantive "results" orientation. Elections generate little interest if committees are perceived to be public relations or rubber stamp mechanisms.

One of the most crucial factors in judging methods for selection is the degree to which the method produces committees broadly representative of the community. Representativeness, however, is a complex and thorny issue.

Representativeness

District guidelines highlight the multiple meanings assigned to representativeness. Among 15 districts specifying types of representation, the following categories appear:

TABLE 3-4: Types of Representation Specified in Documents of 15 Districts

Category for Representation	Number of Districts Specifying the Category (N=15)
Age (students, senior citizens)	13
Sex	4
Race-ethnic group	9
Class (income or occupation)	3
Parent	14
Non-parent (or total community)	13
School Administration	14
Teachers	15
Other organized groups (civic, business, staff, etc.)	9

When districts specify representations, categories are more likely to indicate age or role groupings than racial, ethnic, or social class characteristics. In one district visited, the school board monitored principal appointees closely and refused to accept slates judged non-representative. This practice did not appear to be widespread, and the perceptions of both chairpersons and principals indicate concerns in this area.

TABLE 3-5: Perceptions of Representativeness of Committees (1977)

Principals: Is the committee broadly representative of the community?

Yes: 78% No: 26% Don't Know: 2%

Chairpersons: How well do you feel the committee represented the community?

All Segments:	Most Segments:	Few Segments:	No Answer:
29%	44%	22%	5%

Approximately one quarter of both groups of respondents perceived gaps in representation. When chairpersons were asked to indicate

which groups should be better represented, the following pattern emerged:

TABLE 3-6: Groups Needing Better Representation as Identified by Chairpersons (1977) (N=68)

Blacks	25%	Middle income	6%
Spanish speaking	15	All socio-economic groups	6
Low income	15	Professional	3
Working class	10	All other	13
Parents	7		

District guidelines commonly identify parents as a group to be represented, yet some chairpersons see them as needing better representation. The other racial, ethnic, and economic categories perceived as under-represented are not generally specified in guidelines. These results parallel very closely the findings of the 1974 survey which urged greater attention to minority representation and cautioned about the predominance of professionals on the committees. The 1977 survey does not yield information on general committee composition, but it does reveal the professional background of responding chairpersons:

TABLE 3-7: Educational Background of Responding Chairpersons (1977)

Grade school only	0%
Some high school	1.5
High school graduate	22.1
Some college	26.8
College graduate	42.7
No answer	6.9

Chairpersons, therefore, are well-educated people who offer a rich resource to schools. Given the current pattern of selection

by appointment and the absence of immediate and feasible alternatives, both principals and chairpersons stand in need of guidance and direction in identifying standards for representativeness and in developing more careful procedures to insure broad community participation. Furthermore, some principals and chairpersons indicate the committees are representative. These judgments could be verified so that the experience can be made available to others as an example of tested practice and as encouragement to refine inadequate procedures.

In terms of committee structures, then, no further state-level action seems necessary. Some type of assistance, however, is needed to improve the representativeness of committees.

SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS

Research Questions

The 1973 legislation directed local school boards to establish advisory committees. How have districts defined the "advisory" responsibilities of committees? Do the committees work with the principal "on the development of budget, program, personnel policy, and to improve the quality of education?"

Summary of Findings

In the absence of well-established policies and procedures for school advisory committees, school boards were, in effect, required to "invent" them. Policy documents in a few districts simply reiterate the state law; in a majority of districts, emphasis is placed on public relations and communications. Guidelines for school-level committees tend to be more specific than those for

district-level committees; guidelines in large urban systems tend to be the most specific and comprehensive in identifying arenas for committee action. The majority of committees participate in some fashion in the preparation of the annual report of school progress and in advising school staff on community conditions. Many address other school issues as well, but few committees prepare formal recommendations related to total school operation and monitor action on them. Both chairpersons and principals require additional resources and support if committees are to move beyond their present stage of development.

Defining Functions

The statute mandating school advisory committees reflects an effort to articulate policy at the state level and give local districts freedom to implement the policy. This strategy shifts operating responsibility to the local level. In the case of advisory committees, this is particularly difficult because there is no well-established tradition for such committees and no widely available literature on design or standards. Given the primitive state of the art of creating general-purpose school committees, Florida districts were required to "invent" policies and procedures.

Field interviews strongly suggest that school boards were not enthusiastic about school advisory committees. At least in early stages--and sometimes for a considerable period of time--those groups that lobbied against the legislation on the state level and "lost" transferred their energies to the local level. Generally, regulations reflect a "lowest common denominator or

line of least resistance" tone. This suggests that a major consideration in defining functions was to minimize objections from critical parties, who varied from county to county. Although formal and informal arrangements by which the process took place differed from place to place, it appears that superintendents took the initiative for proposing functions at least as often as the school boards themselves. In some cases, it appears that the superintendent and school boards acted without any consultation. This meant that neither citizens nor principals participated in formulating committee functions.

Districts vary widely in functions outlined in policy statements, administrative regulations, and guidelines. Documents from 33 districts clearly reflect the influence of federal advisory council requirements and of traditional constitutions and by-laws. The documents concentrate on specifications for members and meetings. Responsibility for clearly defining functions tends to be transferred elsewhere.

Because participation in the preparation of the annual report of school progress is mandated by legislation, it will be treated separately. This review of documents examines directives which supplement that function.

Six (18%) of the documents analyzed simply reiterated the state legislation. The remaining documents identified a wide range of arenas for committee action:

TABLE 3-8: Arenas of Action for Committees Specified in Documents of 33 Districts

Arenas of Action for Advisory Committees	District-Level Committees (N=14 districts)	School-Level Committees (N=19 districts)	Total %
1. Public Relations*	13	8	64
2. Planning	12	5	52
3. Curriculum	10	6	48
4. Facilities	12	2	42
5. Evaluation	10	4	42
6. Budget	8	4	36
7. After-school program/ non-school resources	0	8	24

Other: Advocacy--1; Personnel--1

*In 3 districts this was the single specific arena for committee action.

Especially for district-wide committees, public relations is the most commonly accepted arena for committee action. But patterns vary widely. While 11 districts only repeat the law or identify one arena for action, nine districts specify seven or more arenas of activity. The following table summarizes the number of different specifications in district documents according to type of committee (district or school) and according to State Profile categories (I--large urban to V--small rural):

TABLE 3-9: Specifications in District Guidelines According to Size and Urbanization of 33 Districts

\+ = a district with guidelines for school-level committees
o = a district with guidelines for district-level committees

	Law only or one other arena for action	3-6 arenas for action	7-10 arenas for action
Group I (large urban) School-level			+++++
(N=8) District-level	o	o	o
Group II School-level	++	++	
(N=6) District-level	o	o	
Group III School-level	+	+++	
(N=6) District-level	oo		
Group IV School-level	+	+	++
(N=8) District-level	o	ooo	
Group V School-level		+	+
(N=5) District-level (small rural)	oo	o	
	11	13	9

(Documents received represented 50% of districts in Groupings II, III, and IV. Grouping I is slightly over-represented with documents from 66% of the districts in this grouping; Grouping V is under-represented with documents from 33% of the districts.)

These patterns show first that guidelines for district-wide committees specify fewer arenas for committee action than those for school-level committees. Seven of the 11 documents with minimum specifications are for district-wide committees. Eight of the nine documents with the most specifications are school-level. The patterns also reveal that guidelines for committees in large urban districts specify more arenas for committee action than other types of districts. Five of the eight districts with most specifications are large urban districts. The specification of arenas for action serves the double purpose of clarifying

committee responsibilities and legitimating an expanded scope of activity, presumably contributing to committee effectiveness. Whether or not this is the case, large urban school districts have moved the farthest in such specification. Both annual reports and field interviews support the view that committees in large urban systems show greater sophistication and skill in functioning.

The phrase "arena for action" has been used in this discussion because of variations in the ways committee duties are formulated in documents. Two illustrations give some flavor of the range of detail provided:

District Q: "The committee must be advisory in nature, but must be able to offer suggestions on all phases of school activity including discipline and curriculum. . . . The term advisory is intended to mean: (1) inquiring; (2) informing; (3) suggesting; (4) recommending; and (5) evaluating."

District R: Purposes

1. Identifying and stating, to the principal, school-level educational needs and concerns as seen by the advisory committee.
2. Assisting the principal by responding to requests from him/her that the committee study identified school issues, problems, and programs, and submit reports and/or recommendations for consideration.

3. Serving as a communication link between the principal and community being served on matters concerning the school and its educational program.
4. Advising the principal on resource allocation priorities in those areas where the principal may have discretion in the expenditure of school funds.
5. Participating, at the request of the School Board or central-area administrative office, in surveys and study of selected problems, programs, and issues.
6. Assisting the principal in the formation and completion of the School Report, required by state statute 229.575.
7. Sending representatives to the regional advisory committee who will represent the school and serve as members of the regional committee.
8. Providing a forum for individual citizens who wish to present subjects for the committee's consideration which relate to improvement of the school and its instructional program.

The second set of duties offers much clearer direction, and it is followed by a set of procedures for initial steps in

organization. In general, however, district documents focus on what without dealing with how. In fact, typically, recommendations for how seem to work at cross purposes with identified functions. For example, 50 percent of the documents suggest that committees meet five or fewer times during the year. The survey of chairpersons confirmed that this is the case: 52 percent reported meeting five or fewer times; 4 percent reported meeting more than once a month, a few reported meeting once. As an additional example, only three of the 33 sets of documents mention the support that committees need to function: orientation, workshops, financial support.

In general, local policies and guidelines do not authorize functions and related services which would enable committees to "function as an advisory group to the principal and in general work with him on the development of budget, program, and personnel policy and to improve the quality of education." Although the aim is to identify the individual school "as the basic unit of accountability in Florida," little has been done by school boards to further this concept by giving school advisory committees functions to complement their responsibilities related to the annual report of school progress.

Written policies, however, do not necessarily reflect practice. Field interviews point up two contrasting situations. For example, District S documents simply reiterated the law. Here, there was little school board or central office support or encouragement for local committees. One principal who had carefully documented committee recommendations and action taken

on them simply filed them "for the record." There was no review of them or of any other committee's action. On the other hand, although District T documents specified only the area of public communications, the school board regularly reviewed appointments as well as committee recommendations and follow-up action. In addition, a central office administrator was assigned responsibility for committees and carefully monitored both progress and problems.

These interviews verified the critical role of the principal. Even where district support and commitment is strong, a considerable investment of principals' time and effort is necessary to move toward some uniform standards of quality for committees; where district support is lacking, individual principals can develop effective committees, but their efforts remain idiosyncratic and unique in the system.

Moving from policy to what committees, in fact, do, brings us to the crucial point where functions, stated in laws, policies, and regulations, translate into reality. At this point, a single individual, the principal, reigns virtually supreme. While laws, policies, and regulations are necessary, they are by no means sufficient to insure that committees exist or operate at the local school level.

Several pieces of evidence reinforce this point. Participation in the preparation of the annual report is the single function for committees specified by law. Although the annual report will be treated in more detail later, we can note here that

25 percent of the local chairpersons responding to the 1977 survey indicated that the committee made no recommendations for the report. This closely parallels the 1974 survey where 73 percent of the respondents reported they were involved in preparing the report. Field interviews as well as comments on the 1977 survey further substantiated that there are large numbers of committees that exist only "on paper." Principals have considerable latitude in choosing to respond to legislation, school board policies, and regulations. Information on committee functions comparable to the 1974 survey was gathered in the 1977 survey.

Several points can be made:

1. The pace of progress in involving more committees in more areas is apparently very, very slow.
2. Both principals and chairpersons are in agreement that there are only two areas where more than 50 percent of committees make recommendations: the annual report and "advising" on community conditions.
3. In almost all cases, principals report committees making fewer recommendations than chairpersons report.

TABLE 3-10

Council Functions	School Advisory Committees Involved: Response of 1974 Members	School Advisory Committee Made Recommendations: 1977 Response of Chairpersons	1977 Response of Principals
1. Participating in preparation of Annual Report of School Progress.	72%	66%	78%
2. Suggesting curriculum changes, assisting in textbook selection.	29	37	39
3. Assisting in faculty selection and evaluation.	7	7	3
4. Identifying budgetary needs, assisting in setting spending priorities.	34	45	37
5. Advising school staff on community conditions, aspirations, and goals.	60	64	59
6. Suggesting alternative ways to deal with student problems, school drop-out rate, vandalism, etc.	45	50	39
7. Assisting school administrators in addressing issues such as desegregation, zoning, development of comprehensive education plan, etc.	39	40	36

Three Types of Committees

When placed in the context of information gathered through field interviews and from annual reports, the survey data leads to the brief profile of three types of school advisory committees described in the following table.

TABLE 3-11

Type of Committee	Committee Functions as Described in 351 Annual Reports
1. Paper Committee	
random discussion of school concerns; no formal or informal recommendations; minimal number of members (as few as 1) attending minimal number of meetings (as few as 1)	No mention of Committee 13% Listing of names of committee members only 12% 25%
2. Token Committee	
A. service functions only	Synonymous with PTA/PTO 16%
B. focused discussion of principals' agenda	
random discussion of committee's agenda (if any); formal or informal recommendations reflecting administrative priorities; members tend to represent only themselves and to represent a single interest (e.g. facilities, safety, sports)	Vague description of committee activities or obvious administrator recommendations 51% 67%
3. Advisory Committee (bona fide)	
agenda initiated by both principal and committee; priorities negotiated	
formal recommendations with follow-up monitoring	Joint signatures; committee statement; list of formal recommendations and action taken 8% 8%
members tend to act on behalf of larger constituency and to recognize larger scope of school functioning	
	100%

This estimate that less than 10 percent of committees can be classified as bona fide advisory committees is reinforced by the report on committee functions (Table 3-10).

The preponderance of token committees could be expected at this stage of development. It is probable that without both in-service training for administrators and support and resources for citizens, the picture is unlikely to change dramatically.

Comments on the 1977 surveys indicate that committee members readily identify problems associated with Type 1 and Type 2 committees. Furthermore, in these additional written comments, at least 12 chairpersons emphasized the key role of the principal in committee functioning. For example, "This year our principal wants no part of an advisory committee." or "We have the advantage of very strong cooperation of the principal."

Both chairpersons and principals were also asked what kind of assistance was provided to committees. They ranked their responses in exactly the same order, and the precise rank order holds for responses to a similar question on the 1974 survey. However, chairpersons and principals differ in their identification of areas where training or assistance should be provided. One striking discrepancy occurs in the disagreement concerning information on other committees. Chairpersons give top priority to information on other committees, while principals assign it a very low priority.* There was common agreement on the need for guidelines or handbooks as a high priority.

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*This emphasis on information about other committees is particularly significant in light of committees' isolation from other groups which will be reported later.

TABLE 3-12: Areas for Training or Assistance for Committees (1977)

Areas Where Assistance was Provided Rank Order of Responses	Areas Where Asistance Should be Provided Principals	 Chairpersons
1. Committee's purpose/ responsibilities	1	7
2. Curriculum	6	3
3. Guidelines or handbooks	4	5
4. School system functions	1	2
5. Budget	1	3
6. Leadership, problem solving	4	6
7. Information on other committees	7	1
8. Public speaking*	8	7

*This item did not appear on the 1974 survey; it was added after field interviews when it was identified as a priority need in low income and minority areas. It illustrates local variations which need attention even though they do not register on statewide data.

Field interviews confirmed that members placed overwhelming emphasis on concrete and specific information. They wanted examples, outlines, material on what has worked elsewhere; in short, they do not want to reinvent the wheel everytime they become involved in a committee. The following two comments attached to the 1977 survey speak directly to these issues:

> Our committee was all volunteer. The School Board and Superintendent's office furnished us with a very condensed version (their version) of what we should do. Toward the end of year I obtained a booklet from Tallahassee which covered all our duties and responsibilities. Had this booklet been available from the beginning I'm confident a meaningful job could have been done. The county school system is in my estimation not meeting their

> requirements of the law. Because they are keeping the committee in the dark by the publication of their own version of what should be done.
>
> The League of Women Voters of our county has initiated plans for a workshop for SAC members. The purpose being to assist SAC's in becoming functional through understanding the law, its history and intent and opening up information-communication channels. This type of thing should have been provided by or through the District Office of Education or school boards in 1973. The District Office also has been negligent in providing contact people--liaison people--for SAC's. In trying to obtain information on SAC-success stories, handbooks, etc. we were unable to locate a District Office of Education Department to obtain same.

These quotes clearly indicate that citizens who invest time and energy want to benefit from the experience and knowledge of others.

Effectiveness

The 1977 survey provides additional information on perceptions of the effectiveness of committees. The data in the following table indicates another discrepancy in the perceptions of chairpersons and principals. While a large majority of chairpersons feel positively about committees, only a bare majority of principals do. Principals are more likely to say that committees "accomplish little." Most significant of all, 21 percent of the principals, as compared with 5 percent of the chairpersons, feel that the committees should be disbanded.

TABLE 3-13: Perceptions of Committee Effectiveness

In general, how would you rate the effectiveness of the school advisory committee?	Members 1974	Chairperson 1977	Principal 1977
1. Felt a real contribution to the improvement of the school was made.	23%	22%	21%
2. Felt that a contribution was made but that more could have been done.	49	45	33
3. Although little was accomplished it was an enjoyable experience.	15	5	14
4. Felt only a small contribution was made. Major changes need to be made in the committee.	10	12	10
5. Felt that no contribution was made. Committees should be disbanded.	3	5	17
6. No answer.	-	11	5

This negative view is particularly important in light of the evidence that the main responsibility for translating policy into practice rests with principals. Laws, policies, and regulations only serve as a foundation with the principals becoming the primary determinant of what, if anything, gets built on it, how it gets built, and over what period of time.

One critical question arises: Is there enough success within the most effective committees and enough potential in other groups to warrant investing resources in the effort? Both chairpersons' comments and field interviews indicate that the answer is "yes." A sense of accomplishment or at the very least

optimism appears in written comments of some chairpersons. For example:

> Not only were our collective opinions openly accepted, they were acted upon and follow-up reports on their success were provided for us.
>
> SAC's have excellent potential value in the educational system but certainly have not served any worthwhile purpose within our county. Administrators as a whole have formed committees to meet the requirements of the law only.
>
> If restructured, the committee could prove to be most valuable to all concerned.
>
> The community appears to be aware of our Group and knows what the "initials" stand for--that's PROGRESS. SAC may not be the perfect answer but thank goodness we have it.
>
> We have a long way to go and next year this report will look a lot different.

Principals interviewed in the field, who could point to the progress of their committee, spoke with pride of their accomplishments and recognized an effective committee as an indicator of an added dimension of their administrative competence.

The Florida experience at the local level is marked by minuses as well as pluses. In terms of functions, committees have reached a plateau; there has been little change over the last four years. Without some infusion of external support and resources for both principals and chairpersons, that picture is not likely to change. But there is also a solid base of experience and a realistic enthusiasm among citizens and administrators ready to be tapped as an energizing force for moving to a new level of development. School advisory committees clearly are an important link in related efforts to make the

individual school the unit of accountability in Florida. The present plateau is not permanent; if the movement is not forward, there will be slippage and loss. The time is ripe for demonstration of continuing commitment in terms of state-level support.

ANNUAL REPORTS

Research Questions

In describing school advisory committees and the annual report of school progress, the Governor's Citizens' Committee report emphasized the reports' uses for providing public information (reporting to parents, students, and public at large); for providing public education (detailing improvements and identifying areas in need of further improvement); and as a basis for action as a powerful tool for school-level improvements and innovations. What progress has been made toward these goals?

Summary of Findings

Most school advisory committees are involved at least minimally in the preparation of the annual report which provides an unprecedented quantity of information to the public. The information, however, is of uneven quality and it is rarely used for educational or action purposes. Beyond involvement with the annual report, committees give minimal attention to developing formal or informal communication channels inside or outside the school. They tend to function in a vacuum without links to other school groups, the community, to the groups in the state. Even minimal assistance in this area could lead to substantial improvement.

Annual Report of School Progress

Because participation in preparing the annual report of school progress is specified in legislation, it is the most commonly recognized responsibility of committees. Yet, 25 percent of chairpersons responding to the 1977 survey indicated they were not involved in preparing it, and 19 percent of the responding principals reported it was not an area where committees made recommendations. Furthermore, field interviews with chairpersons indicated that even when they were involved, there was little sense of "ownership" of the publication. Although some committees assumed responsibility for designing a survey of parent and student attitudes, many simply reviewed materials prepared by the principals. Because many of the prescribed categories of information call for statistical data available only through the school administration, there was a tendency to see these categories as outside the purview of the committee.

A review of 351 annual reports from 30 districts identified a wide variety of formats from single sheets printed on both sides to 16-page pamphlets. Many district offices provided substantial support to principals in supplying data and suggesting formats. None of the district guidelines for annual reports, however, offered any suggestions on ways in which principals could involve the committee in preparing the report.

Even where reporting formats were uniform, substance varied widely; one striking feature which recurred frequently was the "empty" sentence--the statement conveying no information. For

example, while one school might comply with requirements by giving the number of school suspensions, another might report: "School X's suspension practices adhere to the rules and regulations established by Florida Statutes and the policies of the School Board of Y County." or "Z School had the average number of suspensions this year." One school reported on student performance: "Students performed at the County average in this year's testing program." The most common blanket statement reported on parent involvement: "The School Advisory Committee rendered invaluable assistance in making recommendations for school improvement."

Other schools avoided "empty" reporting but supplied data that was not easily comprehensible. School A in one district presented the results of a school testing program by listing test categories with stanines in a table that might easily bewilder an ordinary parent. Both budget data and student performance data require much more enlightening treatment than is generally provided. On the other hand, there are counter examples of information being conveyed clearly and helpfully. School B included with their scores a brief introduction which explained the scores and identified shifts, before reporting scores for two years with both district and school medians. The explanation and the comparative data were both readily understandable.

Given the 10 categories of information required in annual reports, it seems safe to assert that the public is receiving a substantial (and unprecedented) amount of information about

schools. But the extremes in the quality of the information suggest that currently the annual reports are minimally useful in helping citizens make judgments about the effectiveness of schools or in serving as "powerful tools for school level improvements and innovations." More importantly, as far as could be determined, the publication and distribution of the report marked the end of the process. No available evidence indicated that the report served as a basis for discussion of school issues by parents or by the committee. There is also no evidence that the wealth of both direct and indirect data on school operation was utilized at district or state level. This failure to use existing information represents a serious waste.

The uneven quality of annual reports may explain some of the ambivalence expressed by chairpersons surveyed in 1977 and the apparent shifts since 1974:

TABLE 3-14: Attitudes Regarding the Annual Report of School Progress

	1974 Committee Members	1977 Committee Chairpersons
1. Useful. Should be continued as is.	65%	50%
2. Somewhat useful, but information on ___ should be included.	15	9
3. Somewhat useful, but information on ___ should not be included.	1	1
4. Not particularly useful; should be continued on a voluntary basis.	14	20
5. Not useful. Should be discontinued.	4	7
6. No answer.	-	13

At least half the principals interviewed in field visits expressed concern that citizens did not read the material. Almost all reported that they never received feedback from citizens about it, even when they had made specific efforts to make it readable. A smaller number felt that the report was a waste of their time (given more pressing tasks) and taxpayers' money (given a limit on resources), while others objected that it duplicated other communications to the home. This negative view is reflected in the testimony of superintendents before the Elementary and Secondary Schools House Education Subcommittee (fall 1977) when they urged the elimination of the annual report. At this same hearing a group of parents as well as the Commissioner of Education urged continuation.

More than half of the principals interviewed during site visits, however, voiced either mild or strong support. Several noted that after the initial report, the task took less time; they also noted that some of the information, such as budget data, was important for parents and it was not disseminated in routine school notices. The preparation of the annual report, with the participation of the committee, is one more illustration of "principal overburden." Since it is easy to see why principals might be resistant to the report requirement, added significance is given to evidence of support.

Public Information

District policies and guidelines emphasizing public relations and public information responsibilities for committees typically

reiterate provision of the "Sunshine Law" (public notice of meetings, publication of agenda or minutes, open meetings) without giving more detailed directives.

The 1974 Senate staff survey identified a communication gap between committees and the general public: 18.2 percent of the survey respondents indicated they made no effort to inform the public. This gap still exists: 20 percent of the 1977 chairpersons reported no effort to inform the public. Response in 1977 concerning public information is presented in the following table.

TABLE 3-15: 1977 Chairpersons Survey--Communications

Indicate how the SAC informed the public of what was being done. Select as many as appropriate.

Distribution of minutes of SAC meetings	24%
Newsletter	28
Announcement through the media (press, radio, TV)	37
Open meetings and publishing recommendations	53
No attempt was made to inform the public	18
Other	19

Procedures identified under "other" included notice through students, telephone or person-to-person messages. Several chairpersons reported using PTA/PTO meetings as communications channels, and one used church bulletins for parents who did not receive newspapers. After completing the item, however, one chairperson noted: "We were never informed or instructed that these avenues were open or available to us."

Field site interviews confirmed that formal and informal communications posed problems for committees. One urban school had 39 nationalities represented in the student body so language barriers were severe. Although this case was extreme, several interviewees noted difficulties in contacting non-English-speaking parents. In rural areas both high levels of illiteracy and distances in districts covering from 25 to 40 miles created a different set of problems. In general, administrators seemed satisfied with the normal flow of school news to the home, although few of the bulletins or newsletters scanned during field visits directly referred to committee activities. Chairpersons stated in interviews that local newspapers generally published notices submitted, but approximately 40 percent of the surveyed chairpersons reported that the public and the media "gave no indication of interest." This lack of visibility was typified by one full-page feature in a local newspaper on the district schools. In outlining the main features of the school system, no mention was made of the school advisory committees although they were functioning regularly in each school.

In an effort to get a sharper picture of committee relationships with other groups, chairpersons responding to the 1977 survey were asked to report communications--either person-to-person or written--with 11 different groups. Although not many chairpersons responded to these items, the responses reporting "no communication" do form a pattern:

TABLE 3-16: 1977 Chairperson's Survey

No Communications with Individuals/Groups

From your Committee to*		To your Committee from
17%	local school board	21%
11	superintendent/central staff	15
33	local PTA/PTO	38
56	other local school groups (e.g. Title I Councils)	60
76	other local citizen groups (e.g. LWV, NAACP)	81
80	local teacher union	78
60	state senate/representatives	69
74	legislative staff	80
65	state department of education	69
91	state-level citizen or professional groups	98
99	national citizen or professional groups	96

*Because of a high level of non-response, adjusted frequencies are reported here.

This absence of interaction--particularly with other school groups--highlights the isolated existence of many committees. Some committees did communicate <u>often</u> with three groups: superintendents/central staff (39%); local PTA/PTO (26%); and local school boards (28%). These were also the groups from whom they often received communications. All in all, the data suggests that a large number of committees function in a vacuum, with

little opportunity to exchange information or ideas with others.

Chairpersons were also asked, "If you have not communicated with any of these individuals or groups, do you think that the committee would benefit from future communications with any of them? Please circle appropriate numbers." Their response is contained in the following table.

TABLE 3-17: Chairperson Survey 1977

Groups with Whom Communication Would be of Benefit (Rank Order)

Individual Groups	Number Circling Item	Rank Order
state department of education staff	35	1
state senator/representative	27	2
local school board	20	3
local PTA/PTO	19	4
legislative staff	18	5
superintendent/central staff	17	6
other local school groups	17	6
local teacher union	16	8
other local citizen groups	12	9
national-level citizen/professional groups	6	10
none	6	10
state-level citizen/professional groups	5	12

Taken together, these findings lead to the following observations:

1. There is a disagreement between principals and citizens over the issues of how important and useful it is for citizens to be given a clear comprehensive report of what happens in local schools.
2. The "medium is the message." The annual report must communicate important information clearly and in an inviting format. Otherwise, it is very likely to serve little beneficial purpose for the larger community and to discourage activist parent/citizen groups from trying to help it realize its potential.
3. For committee members, learning through communicating and sharing information with other concerned parties seems to be highly valued. More and more it is recognized as an essential ingredient in the process of becoming actively involved at the local school.

Two distinct kinds of needs can be identified: support and incentives for principals to improve the quality of annual reports, and some mechanisms for committee members to exchange information with others, both inside and outside the school and at the state level.

SECTION 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

1. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES, AS OUTLINED IN THE 1973 REPORT OF THE GOVERNOR'S CITIZENS' COMMITTEE

ON EDUCATION, IS BOTH A LOGICAL AND A NECESSARY COMPONENT OF ANY EFFORT TO ESTABLISH THE LOCAL SCHOOL AS THE UNIT OF ACCOUNTABILITY. The spirit and intent of the recommendations of the Governor's Citizens' Committee are integrally related to concurrent efforts to reduce public alienation and to increase educational responsiveness by restructuring decision making. There is ample evidence that, when participants function as bona fide partners in areas of decision making and policy setting, citizen committees can contribute to reducing cynicism, eliminating problems of excess centralization and bureaucratic control, and improving the quality of schooling.

2. THE LEGISLATION FOR SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES AND FOR ANNUAL REPORTS OF SCHOOL PROGRESS SUPPORTS RELATED EFFORTS TO FOCUS ATTENTION ON THE LOCAL SCHOOL AND HAS, IN FACT, SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED THE QUANTITY OF PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AT THE INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL LEVEL AS WELL AS THE QUANTITY OF INFORMATION REPORTED TO THE PUBLIC. The legislation has proved to be an effective policy vehicle for generating new structures and new reporting systems at the school level. There is widespread compliance with the letter of the law. There are also a few examples of systematic efforts to establish practices which reflect the initial spirit and intent of the recommendations of the Governor's Citizens' Committee.

3. DESPITE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENTS MADE IN 1974, THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS IN QUALITY OF COMMITTEE PERFORMANCE. WITHOUT SYSTEMATIC INTERVENTION, LITTLE PROGRESS

IS LIKELY, AND FUTURE EVALUATIONS WILL SIMPLY RESTATE PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS. In 1974, a study conducted by the staff of the Senate Education Committee surveyed school advisory committees and made recommendations for improvement in several areas including information-flow and training. Except for indications of the shift to school-level committees, the bulk of the data collected for this present study simply confirm and refine the picture sketched in 1974. Little is to be gained by simply repeating the recommendations of that study which have not been acted upon. Unless some clear-cut mechanisms are established to see that improvements are initiated and sustained, little progress is likely. This stalemate substantially eliminates opportunities to gain a more sophisticated understanding of how committees can function at more productive stages of development.

4. THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION OF SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES ARE RELATED TO: (A) THE LACK OF SIGNIFICANT POWER AND AUTHORITY ASSIGNED TO SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES; (B) ISOLATION OF SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES IN THE LOCAL SCHOOL SETTING AS WELL AS IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY; AND (C) ABSENCE OF ADEQUATE INFORMATION, TRAINING, AND OTHER SUPPORT SERVICES TO ENABLE CITIZENS TO CARRY OUT THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE ANNUAL REPORT OF SCHOOL PROGRESS AS WELL AS FOR OTHER ESSENTIAL AND RELATED TASKS. Local school boards, which were not involved in formulating the legislation, were, however, charged with designing implementation strategies. Although large urban

districts have demonstrated greater skill in clarifying roles and responsibilities of school advisory committees, the evidence suggests that less than 10 percent of existing committees prepare formal recommendations on school policy or practice for action by the principal and school board. Only a few school boards give serious attention to the committee structures, functions, and recommendations.

Some school advisory committees are simply synonymous with PTA groups; a large number function in a total vacuum--out of contact with their own school community and with other committees in the district. The groups tend to be totally dependent on the principal for clarification of purpose and direction as well as for information, training, and basic support services. Such responsibilities, added to new management tasks, threaten to create "principal overburden" unless staff development activities assist principals in developing needed skills and unless necessary resources are available at the level of implementation. At the same time, committee members are requesting independent sources of information on their roles, responsibilities, and strategies for action.

5. THE ISSUE OF THE SCOPE OF POWER AND AUTHORITY OF LOCAL SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES IS CRITICAL TO EFFECTIVE COMMITTEE FUNCTIONING. IT TRANSCENDS OTHER ISSUES RELATED TO TYPES OF STRUCTURES, SELECTION OF MEMBERS, AND REPRESENTATIVENESS OF MEMBERS AND CALLS FOR MAJOR ATTENTION. Many local school advisory committees are totally invisible in the school community; some

are never mentioned in annual reports of school progress; few can point to formal recommendations that have been acted upon; there is little to indicate they play a significant role in the life of the school.

The Governor's Citizens' Committee intended committees to function at the individual school level, and the legislation mandated that the groups represent the community served by the school. Questions concerning types of committee structures and the representativeness of members frequently claim attention. These issues, however, are a second-order priority to the issue of council functions. Unless major attention is given to clarifying the power and authority of school advisory committees by giving them a partnership role, efforts to improve structures or selection procedures will be meaningless. Minority repretation, for example, is a continuing problem, but there is minimal gain in recruiting minority members for committees which exercise no influence or which focus on trivial matters. The most powerful incentive for minority participation is the opportunity to influence significant decisions.

6. SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES HAVE LITTLE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OR COMMITMENT TO THE ANNUAL REPORT OF SCHOOL PROGRESS. THERE ARE CURRENTLY NO WAYS TO GAUGE THE IMPACT OF THE PUBLICATION AND FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO USE THE INFORMATION. District and school administrations are now experienced in gathering data for the annual reports. The groundwork has been laid for moving toward fuller realization of the purposes of the publication. Substantial work is needed in preparing explanations which make the data

informative to the average citizen and in providing opportunities for public discussion of the implications. Such tasks are eminently appropriate to members of school advisory committees. Furthermore, sequencing the work of school advisory committees so that recommendations flow from community discussion of the annual report would assist the committees in generating informed discussion on data-based agendas.

7. THE PROBLEM OF THE ISOLATION OF SCHOOL-LEVEL ADVISORY COMMITTEES IS NOT UNIQUE TO FLORIDA; IT IS PART OF A CONFUSED NATIONAL PICTURE OF FRAGMENTED AND OVERLAPPING ADVISORY STRUCTURES. THE LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS OF LOCAL COMMITTEES WILL DEPEND, IN LARGE MEASURE, ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOME COHERENT AND CONSISTENT STATE POLICIES COORDINATING SUCH GROUPS. This study was limited to legislatively mandated, general purpose, school advisory committees. Citizens, however, participate in a wide variety of other school councils: federal laws require a three-tier structure of Title I parent Advisory Councils as well as a host of other special purpose groups; the State establishes a number of advisory groups, such as the Board of Advisors for Educational Research and Development; local districts form committees for calendar-setting or similar tasks. All of these are outside the purview of this study, yet all are concerned with the quality of education in Florida schools. It is apparent that there is no systematic interaction among the groups, no identification of common needs, and no pooling of existing resources. There is little sense of urgency to address the chaos of the scene,

but there is clearly a need for some coordination if the goal of participation is to have long-term significance.

Florida is one of the few states in the nation that is in a position to undertake the kind of policy review necessary to identify ambiguities and contradictions, common needs, and resources in present practice and to move toward a coherent and consistent state policy. This would be a logical extension of the pioneer role that the state has already played on the national scene.

8. IF SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES ARE DEVELOPED IN A PARTNERSHIP CAPACITY TO WORK WITH THE PRINCIPAL ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF BUDGET, PROGRAM, AND PERSONNEL POLICY, AND TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, SOME STATE-LEVEL INTERVENTION IS NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH A MECHANISM FOR ACCOUNTABILITY AND TO COORDINATE THE DELIVERY OF SUPPORT SERVICES. The significant progress made by two districts (Dade and Monroe) receiving external funding to help build advisory committees highlights the necessity of investing some resources in improving committee functioning. A strong case can be made that it is more cost-effective to build a state-level capacity for technical assistance than to leave each district to develop its own system. It seems logical that this assistance could best come from a state-level citizens' group rather than from the Department of Education. At present, a capacity for such technical assistance does not exist within the Department. Furthermore, although the Department does provide some technical services to administrators and policy makers, it is by tradition

and by function a profession-oriented rather than a citizen-oriented organization. It seems reasonable that the burden of responsibility for identifying and responding to the needs of citizen groups ought to fall to an appropriately trained state group of citizens rather than to an administrative agency staffed by professionals.

9. IN ORDER TO MOVE TO A NEW STAGE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LEGISLATION FOR SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES, SEVERAL RELATED STEPS ARE NECESSARY:

A. ESTABLISHMENT OF A STATE-LEVEL CITIZEN GROUP TO CREATE A LINE OF ACCOUNTABILITY FROM LOCAL SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES THROUGH DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARDS TO THE STATE LEVEL.

B. SYSTEMATIC MONITORING OF PROGRESS TO IDENTIFY SUCCESSES AS WELL AS NEEDS AND PROBLEMS.

C. INFORMATION SERVICES AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES.

D. INCENTIVES FOR LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES TO IDENTIFY AND RESOLVE CRITICAL PROBLEMS IN FUNCTIONING, ESPECIALLY CLARIFICATION AND STRENGTHENING OF ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

E. PROVISIONS FOR UTILIZING INFORMATION CONTAINED IN ANNUAL REPORTS OF SCHOOL PROGRESS AT BOTH LOCAL AND STATE LEVELS.

F. A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF STATE POLICIES FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION WITH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COORDINATION AND CONSISTENCY.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. THE LEGISLATURE SHOULD ESTABLISH, ON A PERMANENT AND ACTIVE BASIS, A STATE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND INCLUDE AMONG THE COMMITTEE'S RESPONSIBILITIES THE ENCOURAGEMENT AND MONITORING OF CITIZEN ADVISORY COMMITTEES AT THE DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEVELS. The committee would be the state-level component of the multi-tiered structure which the Legislature has created for citizens' participation in educational decision making--district boards of education and district and/or area or school committees. This action would help to legitimate advisory committees, would reduce their present isolation, and would provide for state-level, citizen-oriented monitoring, service, and information for them.

2. THE STATE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE SHOULD BE AUTHORIZED, FUNDED, AND STAFFED TO MONITOR DISTRICT AND SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES THROUGH SITE VISITS TO A SAMPLING OF ABOUT 10 PERCENT OF THESE COMMITTEES EACH YEAR. This function could be carried out by volunteer citizen visiting teams, following the general patterns established in the accreditation of schools and colleges. Such monitoring is essential to assure that the school committees are carrying out their mandated functions and to identify needs and problems that can be addressed by the committees themselves, district school boards, school administrators, the Department of Education, voluntary citizens' groups, the Governor's Citizens' Committee, or the Legislature.

3. THE STATE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION SHOULD BE AUTHORIZED, FUNDED, AND STAFFED TO ESTABLISH A CITIZEN

INFORMATION SERVICE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ORIENTED TO CITIZEN NEEDS AND INTERESTS. The primary audience for this service would be local school advisory committees but will also include members of district boards of education, parent associations, and independent citizen groups interested in education. The services provided might include a toll-free telephone service, an inexpensive newsletter, and packets of information on topics such as management improvement, basic skills improvement, and procedural help on how advisory committees or other citizen groups can work more effectively.

4. THE STATE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE SHOULD BE AUTHORIZED, FUNDED, AND STAFFED TO PROVIDE SMALL (FROM $500 TO $5,000) COMMITTEE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS TO LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES OR TO INDEPENDENT CITIZEN ORGANIZATIONS OR OTHER NON-PROFIT GROUPS PROPOSING TO PROVIDE TRAINING AND OTHER FORMS OF ASSISTANCE TO LOCAL ADVISORY COMMITTEES. Effective advisory committees need access to resources for training and assistance as well as to information. Small amounts of additional money can make the difference as to whether a committee can perform its mandated functions effectively. The availability of Committee Improvement Grants would provide limited resources either directly to committees or, alternatively, to local citizen groups interested in assisting the committees. The involvement of such groups could help to reduce the serious problem of isolation of the advisory committees from other organizations in the community. The State Citizens' Advisory Committee would establish and

administer the Committee Improvement Grants program to be funded by the Legislature and monitor and assess the program's results. Careful examination should be made of existing funding sources such as the budget for Educational Research and Development and allocations for staff development activities; the State Citizens' Advisory Committee should also be authorized to seek additional funding for this program from private sources.

5. THE LEGISLATURE SHOULD EMPOWER SCHOOL ADVISORY COMMITTEES WITH TWO ADDITIONAL FUNCTIONS:

--TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SELECTION OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND TO PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPING CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF SCHOOL-LEVEL PERSONNEL

--TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSALS FOR SCHOOL MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT GRANTS, EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT GRANTS, AND OTHER SPECIAL STATE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS WHEN THE APPROVAL OF GRANTS REQUIRES WRITTEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE ENDORSEMENT.

At present, school advisory committees have little or no influence over school policy. If they are to be effective, they must be given a stronger role in the management of schools. A good place to start would be in the selection of the school principal. They should participate in the setting of criteria for the principal's position, interview candidates for the principalship, and submit a preference ranking of candidates to the district school board. They should also be given some say as to the qualifications of teachers brought into the school. As school advisory committees become more involved in school-level decision

making, they should be encouraged to help develop and evaluate aspects of the school curriculum.

Participation by the committee in the development of proposals for School Management Improvement and Educational Improvement Grants should lead to improved quality of planning as well as help to invest the committees with meaningful functions and authority, now so clearly lacking in all but a small percentage of cases.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF EACH ADVISORY COMMITTEE BASED ON COMMUNITY REVIEW OF THE ANNUAL REPORT OF SCHOOL PROGRESS SHOULD BE SENT TO THE DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION ANNUALLY FOR ITS REVIEW AND COMMENT AND TO THE STATE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION. This simple procedure will provide a direct communication line from the local advisory committee both to the district boards and to the state-level citizen groups.

7. THE LEGISLATURE SHOULD REQUEST THE STATE CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE TO DEVELOP OVER THE NEXT TWO TO THREE YEARS A COHERENT AND CONSISTENT POLICY FOR CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATIONAL DECISION MAKING ALONG WITH PROPOSALS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SUCH A POLICY. This work should include school advisory committees but extend beyond these to federal requirements for citizen consultation and advisory groups, parent associations, independent citizen organizations, and the roles of district school boards in policy setting and decision making.

This recommendation for policy analysis and the development of a coherent state-wide policy should not be viewed as a substi-

tute for action to make current policies work or for the more specific recommendations that have been made. Nevertheless, long-term policy development is essential if the state is to continue to provide pioneering leadership for the rest of the nation in this area.